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Sao Tome and Principe

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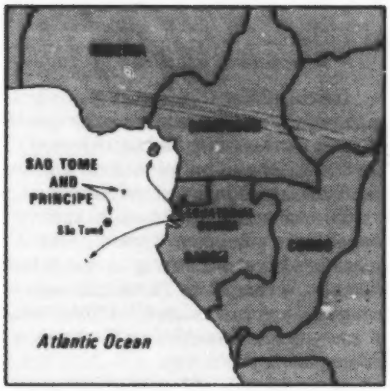

Official Name:
Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Sao Tomean(s). **Population** (1981): 100,000. **Density:** 104/sq. km. (269/sq. mi.). **Annual growth rate:** 2%. **Ethnic groups:** Mixed African, Portuguese-African. **Religion:** 80% Christian. **Language:** Portuguese. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—to secondary level. *Literacy*—about 50%. *Infant mortality rate* (1983)—63/1,000. **Work force** (1981, 21,096): *Agriculture*—70%. *Industry, commerce, services*—11%. *Government*—15%.

Geography

Area: 963 sq. km. (372 sq. mi.); about the size of metropolitan Indianapolis, or one-third the size of Rhode Island. **Cities:** *Capital*—Sao Tome (pop. 40,000). *Other cities*—Trinidad, Santana, Porto Alegre, Santo Antonio. **Terrain:** Two small, volcanic islands. **Climate:** Tropical, with wet and dry seasons, influenced by the mountainous topography.

Government

Type: Republic. **Independence:** July 12, 1975. **Constitution:** November 5, 1975.

Branches: *Executive*—president. *Legislative*—Popular Assembly. *Judicial*—Supreme Tribunal.

Administrative subdivisions: Seven counties, six on Sao Tome and one on Principe.

Political party: Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe. **Suffrage:** Universal adult.

Central government budget (1981): $22 million.

National holiday: July 12.

Flag: Green, yellow, and green horizontal bands, two black stars in the yellow band, red triangle on the staff side.

Economy

GDP (1981 est.): $30 million. **Annual growth rate** (est.): −10%. **Per capita income** (1983 est.): $261. **Avg. inflation rate** (1981): 10%.

Natural resources: Agricultural products, fish.

Agriculture (40% of GNP): *Products*—cocoa, copra, palm kernels, bananas. *Cultivated land*—39,713 hectares.

Industry (8% of GNP): *Types*—light construction, shirts, soap, beer, fisheries, shrimp processing.

Trade (1981 est.): *Exports*—$8.8 million: cocoa, copra, palm kernels, coffee. *Major markets*—Netherlands, Portugal, US, FRG. *Imports*—$20 million: foodstuffs, petroleum products. *Major suppliers*—Portugal, Netherlands, Angola (fuel), GDR, Japan.

Official exchange rate (June 1983): About 43 dobras = US$1.

Membership in International Organizations

UN, Organization of African Unity (OAU), African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, European Community (associate member under the Lome Convention).

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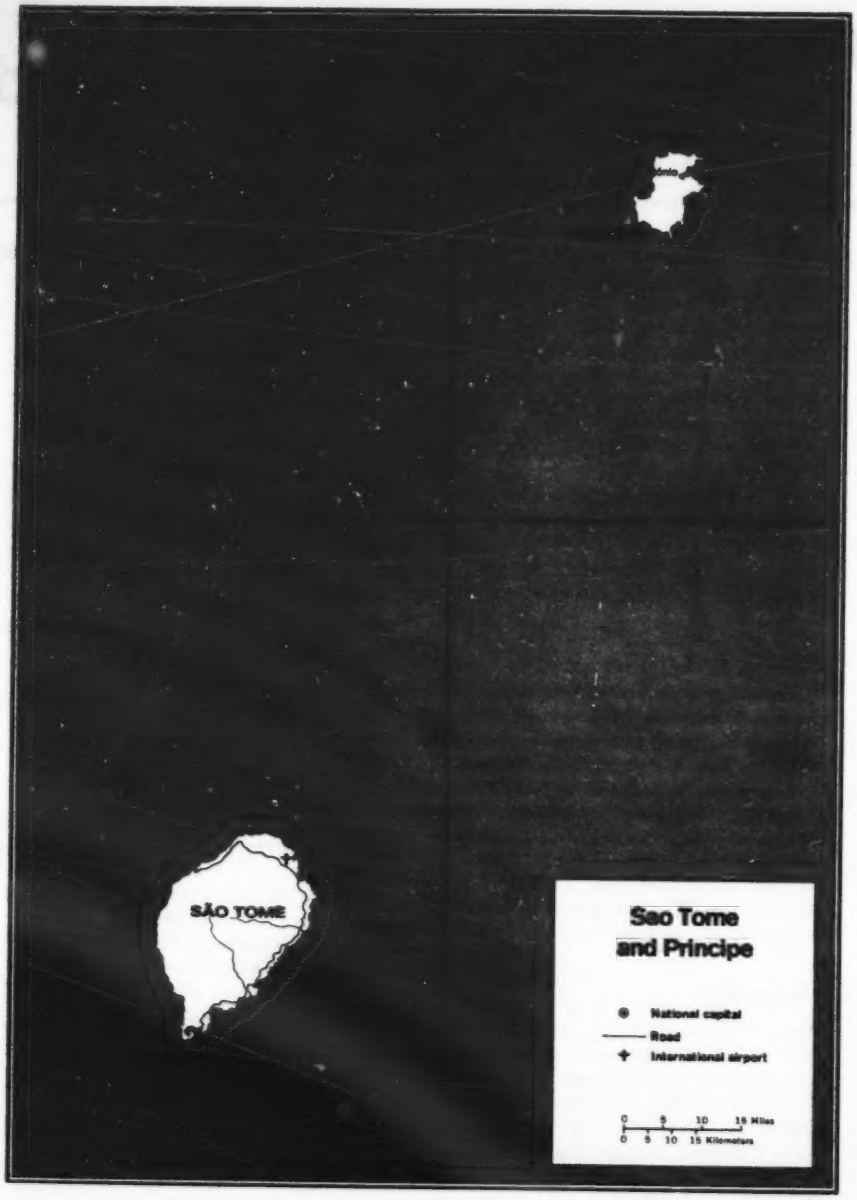

GEOGRAPHY

The islands of Sao Tome and Principe, situated in the equatorial Atlantic about 440 and 200 kilometers (275 and 125 mi.), respectively, off the northern coast of Gabon, constitute one of Africa's smallest countries. Both are part of an extinct volcanic mountain range, which also includes the island province of Equatorial Guinea to the north and Mount Cameroon on the African west coast. Sao Tome is 48 kilometers (30 mi.) long and 32 kilometers (20 mi.) wide and the more mountainous of the two islands. Its peaks reach 2,024 meters (6,640 ft.). Principe is about 16 kilometers (10 mi.) long and 6 kilometers (4 mi.) wide. Both islands are crossed by swift streams radiating down the mountains through lush forest and cropland to the sea.

At sea level, the climate is tropical—hot and humid with average yearly temperatures of about 27°C (80°F) and little daily variation. At the interior's higher altitudes, the average yearly temperature is 20°C (68°F), and nights are generally cool. Annual rainfall varies from 500 centimeters (200 in.) on the southwestern slopes to 100 centimeters (40 in.) in the northern lowlands. The rainy season runs from October to May.

PEOPLE

Of Sao Tome and Principe's total population, about 80,000 live on Sao Tome and 20,000 on Principe. All are descended from various ethnic groups that have migrated to the islands since 1485. Six groups are identifiable:

- *Mestizo*, or mixed-blood, descendants of African slaves brought to the islands during the early years of settlement from Benin, Gabon, Congo, and Angola (these people are also known as *filhos da terra* or sons of the land);
- *Angolares*, reputedly descendants of Angolan slaves who survived a 1540 shipwreck and now earn their livelihood fishing;
- *Forros*, descendants of slaves freed when slavery was abolished;
- *Servicais*, contract laborers from Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde, living temporarily on the islands;
- *Tongas*, children of *servicais* born on the islands; and
- *Europeans*, primarily Portuguese.

In the 1970s, there were two significant population movements—the exodus of most of the 4,000 Portuguese residents, and the influx of several hundred Sao Tomean refugees from Angola.

The islanders have been absorbed largely into a common Luso-African culture. Almost all belong to the Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, or Seventh-Day Adventist Churches, which in turn retain close ties with churches in Portugal.

HISTORY

The islands were first discovered by Portuguese navigators between the years 1469 and 1472. The first successful settlement of Sao Tome was established in 1493 by Avaro Caminha, who received the land as a grant from the Portuguese crown. Principe was settled in 1500 under a similar arrangement. By the mid-1500s, with the help of slave labor, the Portuguese settlers had turned the islands into Africa's foremost exporter of sugar. Sao Tome and Principe were taken over and administered by the Portuguese crown in 1522 and 1573, respectively.

Sugar cultivation declined over the next 100 years, and by the mid-1600s, Sao Tome was little more than a port of call for bunkering ships. In the early 1800s, two new cash crops, coffee and cocoa, were introduced. The rich volcanic soils proved well suited to the new cash crop industry, and soon extensive plantations (*rocas*), owned by Por-

tuguese companies or absentee landlords, occupied almost all of the good farmland. By 1908, Sao Tome had become the world's largest producer of cocoa, still the country's most important crop.

The *rocas* system, which gave the plantation managers a high degree of authority, led to abuses against the African farm workers. Although Portugal officially abolished slavery in 1876, the practice of forced paid labor continued. In the early 1900s, an international press controversy arose over charges that Angolan contract workers were being subjected to forced labor and unsatisfactory working conditions. Sporadic labor unrest and dissatisfaction continued well into the 20th century, culminating in an outbreak of riots in 1953 in which several hundred African laborers were killed in a clash with their Portuguese rulers. This "Batepa Massacre" remains a major event in the colonial history of the islands, and its anniversary is officially observed by the government.

By the late 1950s, when other emerging nations across the African Continent were demanding independence, a small group of Sao Tomeans had formed the Movement for the Liberation of Sao Tome and Principe (MLSTP), which eventually established its base in nearby Gabon. Picking up momentum in the 1960s, events moved quickly after the overthrow of the Caetano dictatorship in Portugal in April 1974. The new Portuguese regime was committed to the dissolution of its overseas colonies. In November 1974, their representatives met with the MLSTP in Algiers and worked out an agreement for the transfer of sovereignty. After a period of transitional government, Sao Tome and Principe achieved independence on July 12, 1975, choosing as its first president the MLSTP Secretary General Manuel Pinto da Costa.

Pinto da Costa was reelected unopposed in 1980 to a second 5-year term. Miguel Trovoada, the first prime minister, fell into disfavor in the early 1980s and, after a period of imprisonment, went into exile in France.

GOVERNMENT

Under the constitution, the Popular Assembly is the supreme organ of the state and the highest legislative body. It is elected for a 4-year period and meets twice annually.

The president of the republic is elected by the Assembly from a list of candidates named by the MLSTP. The president may appoint and dismiss members of the Cabinet, negotiate and ratify treaties, convoke the Popular Assembly, accredit foreign ambassadors and appoint Sao Tomean ambassadors, commute sentences, and exercise pardon. The president may also declare a state of emergency and thereby become invested with special powers. In case of death or incapacitation, the president is immediately replaced by the president of the Popular Assembly. The acting president must then convoke an emergency session of the Assembly within 7 days to elect a new president.

Justice is administered at the highest level by the Supreme Tribunal, named by and responsible to the Popular Assembly. Lower tribunals are appointed to try military cases.

Administratively, the country is divided into two provinces, which correspond to the two islands, and 12 counties—11 of which are on Sao Tome.

Principal Government Officials

President—Manuel Pinto da Costa

Ministers

Foreign Affairs—Manuel Pinto da Costa
Defense—Oscar Aguiar do Sacramento e Sousa
Agriculture and Livestock—Tome Dias da Costa
Planning—Manuel Pinto da Costa
Education and Culture—Ligia de Graca Espirito Santo Costa
Information—Manuel Vaz Afonso Fernandes
Industry, Construction, and Housing—Jose Fret Lau Chong
Commerce and Fisheries—Celestino Rocha da Costa
Labor and Social Affairs—Armindo Vaz de Almeida
Justice—Francisco Fortunato Pires
Transport and Communications—Oscar Aguiar do Sacramento e Sousa
Health and Sports—Frederico Jose Henrique Sequeira
Cooperation—Carlos Alberto Pires Tiny
Secretary of the Council of Ministers—Manuel Vaz Afonso Fernandes
Secretary of State for Planning—Agostinho da Silveira Rita
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs—Guilherme Posser da Costa
Government Delegate in Pague District (Island of Principe)—Manuel Quaresma dos Santos Costa

Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations—Joaquim Rafael Branco

The Sao Tome and Principe Mission to the United States, which is also the Sao Tomean Embassy to the United States, is located at 801 Second Avenue, Suite 1504, New York, New York 10017 (tel. 212-697-4211).

Travel Notes

Customs: Visas should be obtained in advance from a Sao Tomean Embassy. A vaccination certificate against yellow fever is required of all visitors except those arriving from a noninfected area and who stay for less than 2 weeks. Health requirements change; check latest information.

Climate and clothing: Lightweight, washable clothing is recommended year round. At higher altitudes in the interior, evenings can be cool enough for sweaters.

Health: Tapwater is not potable; drinking water should be boiled. Avoid raw vegetables and undercooked meats. Malaria pills should be taken, starting 3 weeks before arrival in the tropics. The islands have adequate hospital facilities for common ailments.

Telecommunications: Telephone and telegraph link the islands with Europe and, more recently, with the African mainland at Gabon, although in the latter case, connections are often difficult. A radio network also connects the Sao Tomean Government with its representative in Libreville. Sao Tome is four standard time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Air service from Libreville is limited to charter aircraft, although subscription flights using aircraft of the Sao Tomean Airline operate about four times a month. The Angolan national airline, TAAG, has two flights weekly from Luanda. Taxi service is available. The Portuguese national airline, TAP, has one flight monthly from Lisbon. Transportation between the islands is by boat.

National holidays: Businesses may be closed on the following official holidays:

Martyrs' Day	February 4
Independence/National Day	July 12
Armed Forces Day	First week in September (varies)
Farmers' Day	September 30

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The MLSTP is the sole political party and dominates the country's politics. During the 1974–75 period, after the coup in Portugal but before Sao Tome and Principe's independence, the MLSTP worked in cooperation with another group, the Civic Association (AS), to formulate new policies and ease the transition to independence. Disagreement soon developed between the two groups, however, primarily over the issue of how quickly revolutionary changes ought to be implemented. The AS, more radical than the MLSTP, favored immediate nationalization of the plantations, retribution against Portuguese colonials who had allegedly com-

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Abshire, David, and Michael A. Samuels, eds. *Portuguese Africa: A Handbook*. New York: Praeger, 1969.

Africa Contemporary Documents: Annual Surveys and Documents. Vols. 1-6. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1968-74.

Africa South of the Sahara. London: Europa Publications, Ltd., 1982 (annual).

Chilcote, Ronald H. *Emerging Nationalism in Portuguese Africa: Documents*. Palo Alto: Stanford University, Hoover Institution Press, 1972.

Gibson, Richard. *African Liberation Movements*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Moser, Gerald M. "African Literature in the Portuguese Language." *Journal of General Education*. Vol. 13, No. 4, Jan. 1962.

mitted abuses, and other drastic measures. The MLSTP, although in basic agreement with the AS on long-term goals, favored a more moderate approach. The MLSTP prevailed and emerged in a predominant position upon independence. A small opposition group is in exile, but there are no opposition groups within the country.

The overriding domestic concern is economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector. In pursuit of its development goals, the new government has achieved a degree of success in mobilizing the population and preserving internal unity.

ECONOMY

Since the 1800s, the economy of Sao Tome and Principe has been based on plantation agriculture. At the time of independence, Portuguese-owned plantations occupied 90% of the cultivated area. After independence, control of these plantations passed to various state-owned agricultural enterprises. The agricultural sector accounted for nearly 70% of employment and virtually all of the country's exports in 1981. The dominant crop on Sao Tome is cocoa, representing about 90% of exports. Other export crops include copra, palm kernels, and coffee. Domestic food-crop production is inadequate to meet local consumption, however, and the country imports much of its food. Efforts have been made by the government in recent years to expand food production, and several projects have been undertaken, largely financed by foreign donors.

Other than agriculture, the main economic activities are fishing and a small industrial sector engaged in processing local agricultural products and producing a few basic consumer goods. The scenic islands may have potential for tourism, but infrastructure to support a tourist industry is rudimentary. The government sector accounts for about 15% of both employment and gross domestic product (GDP).

Per capita income in Sao Tome was estimated at $261 in 1983 and total GDP at about $30 million in 1981. Since independence, the country has had a centrally directed economy, with most means of production owned and controlled by the state. The plantations are operated by 15 government agricultural entities.

In recent years, the economy of Sao Tome has encountered major difficulties, and GDP has declined in real terms. Cocoa exports have dropped in both value and volume, leaving large balance-of-payments deficits. This situation stems from a combination of external and internal factors, including the significantly lower world price for cocoa and production problems on the plantations.

In March 1985, the Government of Sao Tome announced its intention to restructure much of the country's economy. Increased private participation was invited in management of the parastatals, as well as in the agricultural, commercial, banking, and tourism sectors.

The Sao Tomean Government has obtained foreign assistance from various donors. The UN Development Program, the World Bank, the European Community, and the African Development Bank finance projects on the islands. The greatest number of foreign technical advisers are provided by Cuba, the Soviet Union, and various East European countries, but several Western countries, including the United States, have provided bilateral technical assistance.

Portugal remains one of Sao Tome's major trading partners, particularly as a source of imports. However, the Netherlands, the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany represent the largest markets for the country's exports.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Until independence in 1975, Sao Tome and Principe had few ties abroad except those that passed through Portugal. Following independence, the new government sought to expand its diplomatic relationships. A common language, tradition, and colonial experience have led to close collaboration between Sao Tome and other ex-Portuguese colonies in Africa, particularly Angola. Sao Tomean relations with other African countries in the area, such as the Congo and Gabon, are also good.

Sao Tome and Principe maintains diplomatic ties with Western countries, which include Portugal, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the United States, and also with various communist countries, such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, the German Democratic Republic, and Poland. The communist countries have been active in providing technical advisers in Sao Tome, especially Cuba, which has advisers in the Ministries of Education and Planning. The Soviet Union has provided military advisers.

The Sao Tomean Government has announced a foreign policy based on nonalignment and a desire to cooperate with any country willing to assist in its economic development.

U.S.-SAO TOME RELATIONS

The United States was among the first countries to accredit an Ambassador to Sao Tome and Principe. The U.S. Ambassador based in Gabon is accredited to Sao Tome on a nonresident basis. The Ambassador and embassy staff make periodic visits to the islands. The first Sao Tomean Ambassador to the United States, resident in New York City, was accredited in 1985.

The United States funded through the Agency for International Development (AID) from 1981 to 1984 a project aimed at expanding corn production. In 1985, the United States is scheduled to begin a trilateral agricultural project with Portugal on Sao Tome. The United States also provides worker training for Sao Tomeans in specific development fields and contributes food commodities through the World Food Program.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador—Larry C. Williamson
Deputy Chief of Mission—David Kaeuper
Political Officer—Jeanne Vertefeuille
Economic/Commercial Officer—William J. McGlynn
Public Affairs Officer—Thomas Hart

The U.S. Embassy in Gabon is located on the Boulevard de la Mer, B.P. 400, Libreville, Gabon (tel. 241-762003).■